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Letter dated 25 January 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to the letter of 9 January 2007 from Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (A/61/695-S/2007/13, annex), I am directed by my Government to convey the following.

Pakistan is cooperating fully with Afghan and coalition forces to promote peace and security in Afghanistan. This is in Pakistan's vital interests also. Security in Afghanistan is threatened by the multiple threats from warlords, criminals, the drug mafia and intertribal rivalries as well as the resurgence of the Taliban. As the last report of the Secretary-General (A/61/326-S/2006/727) indicates, the main sources of the Taliban insurgency are within Afghanistan.

The Afghan Government and others have emphasized the need to prevent cross-border movement of Taliban and other militants. The 2,560-km international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, traversing some of the most difficult mountainous terrain in the world, with the tribes straddling the border, is difficult to control.

To do so, Pakistan has taken several far-reaching measures. These include the deployment of over 80,000 troops, the establishment of 938 military posts along the international border with Afghanistan and direct military action against those elements in areas bordering Afghanistan who have been indulging in cross-border militancy. In the process more than 700 soldiers and officers of Pakistan's Armed Forces have lost their lives.

Pakistan also maintains close cooperation and coordination with Afghanistan under the framework of the Tripartite Commission headed by four-star generals of the Pakistan Army, the International Security Assistance Force/NATO and the Afghan Army. There is also an intelligence-sharing arrangement with a view to countering militancy.

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However, preventing cross-border movement by militants is a joint responsibility of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the coalition forces. A commensurate effort is required on the other side of the border, where fewer than 40,000 troops are deployed and only 100 military posts exist.

Keeping in view the above factors, and on the basis of its own security assessment of the situation, Pakistan has asked its Armed Forces to work out modalities for selective mining and fencing on its side of the international border with Afghanistan. In doing so, utmost care will be taken to ensure that the sites of selective mining will be clearly marked, and designated crossing points will be established to allow the movement of extended families and tribes living on both sides of the international border. We are also introducing documentation for such movement so as to check crossings by undesirable elements.

Pakistan is not party to the Ottawa Convention and is therefore not bound by its provisions. Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, to which Pakistan is a party, permits the use of landmines or other measures to address the legitimate security requirements of States while addressing humanitarian concerns.

According to our initial survey and study, Pakistan would need to fence or mine a small portion of the length of the border to prevent militants from exploiting areas of difficult terrain to cross the border in both directions. The elaboration of the modalities and subsequent implementation of the plan will take some time. Meanwhile, my Government will be open to reviewing the position if better alternatives to mining become available to control the border.

At present, along the 22 frequented routes where we maintain border posts, every day over 40,000 persons and 14,000 vehicles cross the border in both directions. Pakistan is planning to gradually regulate movement across the international border while respecting the "easement" rights traditionally enjoyed by the tribal population on the two sides. We expect cooperation from the Afghanistan Government to ensure such better regulation. Unregulated traffic is not in the interest of either country. In this context, we note with concern the negative reaction from the Afghan side to the recent introduction of a biometric border-control system by Pakistan at one of the main border crossings.

The problem of cross-border militancy is closely related to the presence of over 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. We have hosted these refugees since 1979. Two million Afghan refugees are in camps, some of which are close to the international border. Over 1 million Afghan refugees live in urban centres of the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. The Taliban militants are able to blend in with these refugees, making their detection more difficult. We would like to see all Afghan refugees repatriated to Afghanistan as soon as possible. We look forward to international assistance and the cooperation of the Afghan Government for the immediate relocation of some of the camps near the border to inside Afghanistan. These camps have often given rise to complaints that they provide shelter to undesirable elements and Taliban.

Pakistan will continue to extend its cooperation to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and combat terrorism in all its forms. We hope the Afghan Government and others concerned will accept their own responsibilities to address the multiple challenges to Afghanistan's security which arise from causes within that country.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Munir **Akram**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative